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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHEM](#) [KDEM](#) [AJ](#)
SUBJECT: AZERBAIJANI PROSECUTOR GENERAL: OPPOSITION YOUTH
ACTIVIST TRIAL IN MID-MARCH

REF: 05 BAKU 1169

Classified By: DCM Jason P. Hyland for reasons 1.4 b and d.

11. (C) First Deputy Prosecutor General Rustam Usubov told us February 24 that the GOAJ criminal investigation into accused youth opposition activist Ruslan Bashirli was almost complete and the case would go to trial between March 10 and March 15. Bashirli was the first of three opposition youth leaders from Yeni Fikir arrested on August 1 for allegedly plotting a coup. Usubov said that PGO investigators have added another charge to Bashirli's indictment, "illegal entrepreneurship" on grounds that Yeni Fikir was not legally registered as a bona fide entity with the Ministry of Justice, an argument to which Usubov repeatedly reverted. (Yeni Fikir is an opposition youth NGO often connected to the Popular Front Party. It is not a business and we find it difficult to see how the GOAJ will justify the illegal entrepreneurship charge.) Usubov also indicated that the investigation into Bashirli's two deputies, Ramin Tagiyev (also in pretrial detention) and Said Nuriyev (released for health reasons) was nearing completion and their cases might be considered concurrently with Bashirli's this March.

12. (C) Separately, Bashirli's father, Jalil Bashirov, met with Poloff February 24 to convey his concern for his son's continued pretrial detention. Bashirov was permitted to visit Bashirli in jail in early February. He claimed that Bashirli, although physically well, was very mentally distressed and showed signs of having been beaten in the past. Bashirli told his father he had been duped and drugged when he participated in the infamous videotaped meeting in July in Tblisi at which he appeared to be complicitous in an alleged coup plot in Azerbaijan (reftel). Bashirli told his father that security agents beat him repeatedly on the head at the time of his arrest in August, the ill effects of which he continues to experience today in the form of daily headaches. Bashirov reminded us that his son was "a patriot who served in the military" in defense of Azerbaijan. He was opposed to the corruption of the current regime but nonetheless believed in peaceful, democratic change. The GOAJ, Bashirov argued, had singled his son out as an example to others.

COMMENT

13. (C) While the widely publicized August videotape shows that Bashirli participated in the infamous meeting in Tbilisi, few observers believe he was capable of carrying out a coup in Azerbaijan. Yeni Fikir is a largely hapless youth group connected to Ali Kerimli's Popular Front Party (PFP) with limited political impact. Consequently, the GOAJ's aggressive pursuit of the Bashirli case, shrouded in secrecy, suggests the GOAJ intention was to send a message to opposition youth organizations in the run up to the November parliamentary election. The recent addition of the lesser

"illegal entrepreneurship" charge suggests that the GOAJ likely has uncovered less evidence of a coup than expected and is now seeking other grounds on which to punish Bashirli and Yeni Fikir. A conviction on charges of "illegal entrepreneurship" would carry a much lesser sentence than treason. Post continues to urge the GOAJ to respect the human rights of the Yeni Fikir detainees and follow the rule of law.
HARNISH